

August 24, 1966

Dr. Ernst Borek
Department of Biochemistry
College of Physicians and Surgeons
New York 27, New York

Dear Ernst:

I hope this letter reaches you more or less directly - I'm a little concerned because I have the impression you may be in Israel now.

I was looking over your book "The Code of Life" again and then decided to use it for an undergraduate course on biology and man that I teach here. This brought me to look a little more closely at your account of the initial work leading to the discovery of bacterial sexuality. I certainly would not want to make a big issue of it but for the sake of the accuracy of the historical record, I thought you should have a more detailed and factual account of the material you give on page 94, paragraph 2. If you do run into a second edition, I hope you have the chance to revise this - otherwise the inaccuracies will simply be propagated ad infinitum. I would also hope that you find some way to mention Francis Ryan by name.

The main point is that I did not quit medical school but rather, initially, took an elective quarter and then what was intended to be a leave-of-absence from the middle of my third year at P and S. The initiation of my work on bacterial recombination is reasonably well described in my first communication to Ed Tatum of which I have been delighted to find a copy and enclose one. I was, of course, encouraged to write to Tatum by Francis Ryan. When I went to Yale, I had no intention of working for a PHD and it was only after the work was essentially completed that the possibility of using the research for a PHD thesis was brought up and fought through by Ed Tatum. As it happened, I then did not go back to medical school but instead accepted a position at the

BOREK

Dr. Ernst Borek

- 2 -

August 24, 1966

University of Wisconsin but this was a matter that took me a very long time to decide and was only settled at the very last moment.

In response to my letter, I found that Tatum was indeed working along much the same line but he, in fact, had done very little about it being rather heavily preoccupied with all of the details of the move and so forth. He did go to great trouble to make it possible for me to work with him on a fellowship from the Childs Fund and it was quite a marvelous experience to work with him. I would have to say, however, that I had learned most of my basic techniques and insight in microbial genetics from working with Francis Ryan.

I do enjoy the breezy style which permeates your book and I realize how difficult it would be to establish rigorous historical documentation for all of the personal impressions which make it such a lively discussion.

Cordially,

Joshua Lederberg,
Professor of Genetics

JL/gem

Enclosure